

CONNECTING THE DOTS: A Case Study

Kentucky Community and Technical College System

Monday, September 22, 11:00-12:00

SCTCS (Statewide Community and Technical College System) has as part of its mission the formation of partnerships and collaborations with both private and public sector organizations and institutions within its state. At its quarterly board meeting the president of SCTCS presents an item for consideration that she believes to be one way to fulfill this part of its mission.

The president proposes expanding the kinds of partnerships they presently engage in with local government and industry to include creation of four regional centers for entrepreneurship that would link to existing curricular offerings within SCTCS. She proposes that an ad hoc group be created to develop a proposed agreement among SCTCS, the state's Office for the New Economy, the state's Chamber of Commerce, and the state's League of Cities. The president would appoint two community college faculty and two technical college faculty to serve on the committee with two designees from each of the other proposed partners. The group would be charged with developing a first draft of an agreement, which would then be reviewed by each of the partners. That draft would be presented for discussion at the next quarterly meeting of the SCTCS board.

The president indicates that a few possibilities had been discussed in her initial conversations with the director of the Office for the New Economy, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, and the director of the League of Cities:

The League of Cities would encourage each of its member cities in the appropriate locations to donate a parcel of land near the edge of an existing community or technical college campus as the site for each of the four regional centers to be built by SCTCS.

SCTCS would encourage donors potentially interested in underwriting the costs of construction of the new buildings.

The Chamber would develop and staff a mentoring program connecting its members as volunteer advisors and mentors to participants in the entrepreneurship centers.

The Office for the New Economy would dedicate staff to develop and support the work of the regional centers.

When the president opens the floor for discussion, Mr. Seller, an entrepreneur known for his string of highly successful furniture stores, is the first to speak. Other board members chime in.

Mr. Seller: "I appreciate the thought and effort that have gone into this, but I think we're getting the cart in front of the horse. I need to know more about what we're going to get from this. I mean, why are we putting all this effort into something that seems a bit to the side of our real job? It would be like adding clothing or cosmetics to my furniture stores. It's not what we do."

Ms. Booker: "I think Mr. Seller has a good point. We have to be careful with our resources, even our potential resources. I think we all have a pretty good idea of who the potential building donors might be, and there are other uses that money might be put to, like increasing classroom space to accommodate the growth in our student population. We've talked about that need for years and never done anything about it. Let's be sure we're meeting present needs before we take on big new projects."

Dr. Curry: "I agree. I don't see how this is central to our mission of educating students. This whole idea of entrepreneurship strikes me as just the latest fad going around. My colleagues and I believe our job is to provide a solid education for our students so they can then go out and contribute to

society. I don't want to spend my time meeting with the Chamber of Commerce or negotiating with them about what the syllabus for my course ought to be."

Mr. Broad: "I guess I see this as something that we do, and potentially worth investing in, but I wonder why we're talking about more buildings. I thought we had agreed not to do more bricks and mortar projects until we had adequate funds to operate the buildings we have. If we're going to talk about new programs, we should be thinking about making them 'virtual' so we don't have to invest in buildings. This would be a good use of technological infrastructure we already have available."

Ms. Verity: "I can see how they might be 'virtual,' but whatever form they take I wonder whether these would be profit centers, and thus risk competing with the private sector and alienating some of the people we are supposed to be serving. On the other hand, if they are cost centers, that would take scarce resources away from our central mission."

Mr. Gravely: "I understand the concerns, but let me provide a little background here that might be helpful. President Nicely has shared some of her thoughts about this with me as we shaped the agenda for this meeting. As chair, I've been interested in having issues like this come before the board for discussion. Some of our peers in other states have begun to work explicitly on entrepreneurship as a way to focus training that contributes directly to economic development efforts. My thought is that we should at least explore some options. I know there are risks to trying new approaches, but I believe there also are risks for continuing to do business as usual. We need to see what opportunities are out there for improving the way we do our work. I'd like to see the board taking more of a leadership role in moving SCTCS forward on these kinds of issues."

Mr. Seller: "Well, if we are heading in this direction, we ought to make sure it's right for us. I know that the analysis the president provided us shows that because of the economic downturn we have had 5,700 people in the state lose their jobs. I understand many of these people need our help in getting more education or retraining so they can go back to work. The survey of businesses showing their needs for employee development shows a real demand for this type of training as well. We sure want to keep the employers we have. On the other hand, the education needs analysis recently done by the state P-16 council shows that we continue to have very low college-going rates and that our poor and minority students are really being left out. Many are dropping out of high school and even fewer are going to college. Maybe we should be devoting more of our efforts on the issue of transfer, and on increasing our partnership efforts with our K-12 schools. Our enrollment is way up, as you all know, particularly with minority students, but far too few of our students are transferring to the state universities. They need our help. The question for me is not whether we should be partnering but who we should be partnering with to do what."

Mr. Broad: "I know that Central University has been working on entrepreneurial efforts with its community, but I think they got dragged into that by the local business leaders, and I'm not sure how well it's working."

Ms. Verity: "Central may have been reluctant, but I know Forest State has been working with the school systems in its region for a number of years to develop joint programs and joint approaches to improving P-16 education. They seem to be having great success. That may be because collaboration with other education institutions is a better fit. That's the kind of collaboration we ought to be thinking about. It also fits with the interest at the state level to have more cooperation among the P-16 organizations in a region."

Ms. Booker: "It sounds like we don't really have a lot of information about what works and what doesn't. I'd want to know what our peers are doing in other states."

Mr. Seller: "Let's not get into another study. We have a specific proposal on the table. I say, let's vote it up or down and go on."

Dr. Curry: "At this point the proposal is to get four of our faculty together with people from the Office for the New Economy, the state Chamber, and the League of Cities to see what they can come up with. I'm not wild about the idea, but I don't see any harm in it. Let's see what they come back with."

President Nicely: "The only word of caution I would add is that I don't think we should proceed with this preliminary work if most of the board is leaning toward opposition to the general idea. If that's the case, then any draft agreement that the ad hoc group comes up with, no matter how good, is likely to be rejected. We don't want to waste everyone's time."

Mr. Gravely: "I agree. So let me be clear about what is being voted on here. A yes vote means that you support the work toward a collaborative agreement and can imagine some proposal you could support."

Mr. Broad: "I understand about not gathering a whole lot of information about what others are doing, but I'd at least like to have some discussion of other kinds of collaborations or partnerships we might pursue. I'm committed to the principles we outlined in our mission, but I think there are many ways to follow them. We have only this one proposal, and nothing to compare it to."

Mr. Gravely: "I understand your concern, but I would hate to hold up this proposal while we generate other options. We'll have time to do that while the ad hoc group is working on a draft agreement."

After some further discussion about the details of the proposed agreement and the role of each of the parties, Mr. Gravely calls for the vote on the proposal. The proposal passes on a unanimous voice vote.

Questions:

Did the board make a good decision?

Which issues raised by board members are legitimate? What are the reasons for your judgments about legitimacy?

What is the appropriate role of the board in the arena of collaborations and partnerships? Sounding board? Advisors? Decision makers?

How early in the process should the board be involved? Should the president have had exploratory conversations with others besides the chairperson?

At what level of detail should the board be involved?

Bringing it home:

What issues raised in the case study are applicable to the Kentucky Community and Technical College System?

What issues are relevant to your work as regents?

You have been provided real data for the state on economic, health, and educational issues.

Look at the three highlighted statistics in your data. What do these numbers suggest about priorities for collaboration and partnerships?

What other data would you want before establishing your priorities for collaboration?

What should be your next steps as a board in establishing priorities and creating partnerships to address public needs?